

A SERVICE FOR TRINITY SUNDAY

GREETING

Welcome in the name of Christ.

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you;
and also with you.

We meet in the name of God:

God the Father,

God the Son,

God the Spirit:

God is one.

HYMN – *How Great Is Our God (The Splendour Of The King)* -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDgmJFw6F64>

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God,
your Son has opened for us
a new and living way into your presence.
Give us new hearts and constant wills
to worship you in spirit and in truth;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.
Amen.

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

God the Father forgives us in Christ
and heals us by the Holy Spirit.
Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness,
all slander and malice,
and confess our sins to God our redeemer.

We have not always worshipped God, our Creator.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

We have not always followed Christ, our Saviour.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We have not always trusted in the Spirit, our guide.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

May the Father forgive you

by the death of his Son

and strengthen you

to live in the power of the Spirit

all your days.

Amen.

FIRST BIBLE READING – *Isaiah 40: 12-17, 27-end*

SEEK THE LORD

Seek the Lord who is still to be found:

call upon God who is yet at hand.

Return to the Lord, who will have compassion:

to our God, who will abundantly pardon.

'For my thoughts are not your thoughts:

nor are your ways, my ways,' says the Lord.

'For as the heavens are higher than the earth:

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

'For as the rain and snow come down from heaven:

and return not again but water the earth.

'causing the earth to bring forth and sprout:

giving seed to the sower and bread to the hungry;

‘so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth:
it shall not return to me empty.

**‘but shall accomplish that which I desire:
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.’**

Based on Isaiah 55: 6-11

Glory to God, Source of All Being,
Eternal Word and Holy Spirit;
**as it was in the beginning is now;
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

GOSPEL READING – *Matthew 28: 16-20*

REFLECTION

Well today is Trinity Sunday – the Sunday when we remember that God is like a parent - father or a mother - to us; that Jesus is God’s Son; and that the Holy Spirit is God’s presence and power for us as Christians. So THREE persons, yet ONE God....

Now the doctrine of the Trinity has always been a difficult one for Christians to understand and to explain; and over the years, different images have been employed. For example, the shamrock – used by St. Patrick – a Celtic saint and the patron saint of Ireland – the shamrock actually being ONE leaf which is made up of THREE parts.

Or, another image that has often been used, especially with children, is to explain the Trinity using water, ice and steam. Water, ice and steam are different because they are in different states – water is a liquid; ice is a solid; steam is a gas. But they are the same because they are all made up of the same chemical – H₂O!

Or another way was that given to me by a ministry student called Mary when she was on placement with me in my last parish. Mary used a jaffa cake to explain the Trinity! Because jaffa Cakes are made up of three parts – chocolate, jam and the cake bit. If you take just one part away, it may still taste nice but it won’t be a Jaffa Cake anymore – it will just be a normal cake, a normal biscuit. What makes a Jaffa Cake a Jaffa Cake is the three separate parts being together – we need all three for it to be a Jaffa Cake....

But although there are things which can help us understand the Trinity; ultimately, I believe, the Trinity is one of those doctrines, one of those beliefs, which is always going to be really beyond our full comprehension and understanding. Because, of course, the Trinity is about God and about the nature of God; and although we human beings can catch glimpses and have fragments of knowledge about God – and although we can, I believe, come to know God in a real and personal way; in the end, we have to accept that God will always be a mystery, that God is beyond mere human understanding; and that whilst God will always be closer to us than our very own breath; God is also always infinitely greater, and more deep, and more wonderful, than our human perceptions will ever be of him... or her...

And that is what the prophet Isaiah is recognising in our first Bible reading from the Old Testament. God is speaking through Isaiah to proclaim to the people of Israel that although they are his chosen people, although they are beloved by him, and are special and precious to him, they will never, ever be able to fully grasp and to fully understand him...

“Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclose the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

Who has directed the spirit of the Lord, or as his counsellor has instructed him?

Whom did he consult for his enlightenment, and who taught him the path of justice?

Who taught him knowledge and showed him the way of understanding?

Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as dust on the scales; see, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

Lebanon would not provide fuel enough, nor are its animals enough for a burnt offering.

All the nations are as nothing before him; they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.”...

So, perhaps, when we think about the Trinity, whilst it is good to theologically wrestle with the idea of how God can be three yet one, or one yet three; and believe me, I love thinking about theology; there does also come a point, I believe, when study and thinking have to come to an end, as it were; we have to accept their limitations; and we have to move beyond our questions, and our theology, and allow ourselves simply to pray, and to worship, and to experience, and to rest on God’s presence...

And it is at this point, perhaps, that this icon comes in: “The Trinity” painted by the Russian painter Andrei Rublev in the 15th century; and regarded as being one of the highest achievements of Russian art.

The icon is actually depicting the visit in the book of Genesis which is made to Abraham and Sarah by three angels at the Oak of Mamre who foretell that despite their great age, they will have a son, and Sarah can’t believe them, and she laughs...

Many people believe that the three angels in the Genesis story are pre-figures for the Trinity; and it is also generally believed that the three angels in Rublev’s icon, as well as being the three angels, are also be understand as the three persons of the Trinity; and that by contemplating Rublev’s icon and by meditating upon and upon it’s possible meanings, we can be drawn further into the mystery that is the Holy Trinity.

So let us just take a moment to look at the icon – to open our eyes and to really see it...



The first aspect of the painting that strikes me, is the fact that the three figures have many aspects in common.

Firstly, the faces of all three figures are the same – identical – and actually, the overall appearance of all three is, to our modern day eyes, rather androgynous.

Each figure has the same face and each figure also has a halo around their heads – the glow of God – a symbol of the divine.

Each of the figures also has the colour blue in their clothes – 600 years ago, blue was the colour of the heavens, the colour people painted God. Blue was God's colour ...

Each is holding a long staff – each staff is exactly the same length and the figures are all holding the staff in their left hands; and all their right hands have two fingers pointing down.

In other words, in the icon, we have three figures who are all the same – and who all are God.

Yet as well as being exactly the same, these three people are also different. The figure on the right of the icon represents the Holy Spirit. That figure, as well as wearing blue, is also wearing green – the colour of Spring, the colour of new life and of growth – a symbol of the spiritual life and growth which the Spirit brings to us as individuals and to the church. The Spirit is touching the table – earthing the divine life of God – making the presence of God real in our everyday lives.

The Spirit is also the Spirit of revelation. Behind the figure is a mountain and, in the Bible, mountains are places where God is made known – think of Moses and the 10 Commandments, Jesus being transfigured on the mountain and ascending to heaven from a mountain.

The Spirit figure is also reclining her or his head – drawing our gaze away from her or himself and towards the figure in the centre...

So let us turn our attention to that figure...

This figure, as well as wearing blue, is also wearing brown – the colour of dirt. This figure is therefore Jesus, the one who came to earth, who put his feet on the ground, who felt dirt between the toes of his feet. The brown speaks of Jesus' humanity. But the central figure is also wearing gold – the colour of kingship. Jesus is the humble king – the one who rode into Jerusalem, as the Messiah, on a lowly donkey.

The Jesus figure is resting his two fingers on the table – laying upon it his human and divine nature; and his fingers are pointing to the cup on the table – the cup of sacrifice that he will drink at his death.

Behind the central figure is a tree – representing, perhaps, the Cross, the tree on which Jesus died; the tree of eternal life – the place where death and life come together – dying and resurrection...

The Christ figure himself inclines his gaze to the figure on the left, and our gaze is, in turn, drawn there too...

To the figure on the left – God, the Father – the Creator. This figure is in a shimmering, ethereal gold. Gold the colour of kingship, of authority, of beauty. The wondrous God who created the beautiful earth.

Behind the figure of the Creator is a picture of a house – an image of the dwelling place of God: “In my Father’s house there are many mansions – I go to prepare a place for you...”

Unlike the other two figures, the Father’s right hand is not touching the table – instead it is held up in a gesture of blessing – God, the Creator, who blessed the earth, who blessed human beings, and declared the creation to be “very good”.

So through his icon, Rublev is using his picture to tell us, the beholder, something about the nature of God. That God is three persons: Spirit in green to help us grow; Jesus in brown walking in the dirt; the Father in gold who created this beautiful earth. But, Rublev is also showing that Christians do not worship three separate God because all three figures are also exactly the same: all are wearing blue, all have a halo, all are holding a staff, all have hands which are the same. Christians worship one God who is three persons.

But there is more. For the icon is not just there to explain the Trinity, it also focuses on the relationality between the three figures. The three figures sit around the table – no one figure is elevated over the others. They sit in an open, circle, each inclining their head to the other. There is, therefore, in the icon a mutual model of interactive community – suggestions of intimacy, love, trust and respect, between the persons of the Trinity – a sense of a dynamic movement of love between the three persons – sense of a circular movement between them.

But is this dynamic movement of love, of intimacy, of trust, of respect, something which is private to those three figures alone – something which is just for them and for no one else?

If you look at the picture what else can you see? That the circle around the table is not enclosed – there is a fourth place open and waiting – open and waiting for who? For us – the ones who are looking at the picture. We are not separate from the icon; rather, we are a part of it – part of the circle around the table. The fourth place is for us – we are invited – we are invited to come to the table, invited to come in and to be a part of that divine circle of love

In other words, with Rublev’s icon, we are not just to think and theologise about the mystery of the Trinity; rather, we are to enter into it... to become part of the circle – to receive the flowing of love that moves between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – and flows outwards to us, to the whole world...

So let us take a moment to look at the icon – to enter into the picture...

Imagine yourself invited to the table...

Imagine yourself taking a seat...

Imagine yourself in the trinitarian flow of love...

What is God saying to you?...

What might you be saying to God?...

This morning, as we come to God who is the Trinity – three persons, yet one God. Let us think about the theology, yes; let us ponder it and study it. But let us also allow ourselves to move beyond our questions and our thoughts and allow the love and the presence and the mystery and the wonder of God to overflow into us, to overwhelm us, and to lead us to pray, to praise and to worship...

Revd. Helen Duckett

HYMN – *Glory* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBV2V8YfBfQ>

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith.

We believe and trust in one God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

INTERCESSIONS

High and holy God,
robed in majesty,
Lord of heaven and earth;
we pray that you will bring justice,
faith and salvation to all peoples...

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

You chose us in Christ to be your people
and to be the temple of your Holy Spirit;
we pray that you will fill your Church with
vision and hope...

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Your Spirit enables us to cry, 'Abba! Father!',
affirms that we are fellow-heirs with Christ
and pleads for us in our weakness;
we pray for all who are in need or distress...

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

In the baptism and birth of Jesus,
you have opened heaven to us
and enabled us to share in your glory:
the joy of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
from before the world was made.
May your whole Church, living and departed,
come to a joyful resurrection in your city of light...

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

**Merciful Father,
accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

COLLECT FOR TRINITY SUNDAY

**Holy God,
faithful and unchanging:
enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,
and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,
that we may truly worship you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

HYMN – *Father We Love You* - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QItVKW6wXdo>

BLESSING

The Father, whose glory fills the heavens,
cleanse you by his holiness
and send you to proclaim his word.
Amen.

The Son, who has ascended to the heights,
pour upon you the riches of his grace.

Amen.

The Holy Spirit, the Comforter,
equip you and strengthen you in your ministry.

Amen.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

FINAL ACCLAMATION

The Holy Trinity,
in whose names we were baptised,
preserve us,
members of Christ,
children of God,
inheritors of the kingdom of heaven,
saved by the waters,
and filled with the Spirit.

Glory to God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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